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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001940

SIPDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2013

TAGS: [PINS](#) [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: MILITARY BUILD-UP KEEPS WARRI QUIET

REF: A. LAGOS 1866

[B](#). ABUJA NI 1594

[C](#). ABUJA 1379

[D](#). ABUJA 1333

[E](#). ABUJA 1354

[F](#). ABUJA 1411

Classified By: RHINSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (SBU) The town of Warri has remained mostly calm over the last two weeks as the Nigerian military and mobile police (known as MOPOL) continue to build a presence in the area. Over the weekend of September 6th, oil service contractors in Warri and a Shell spokesperson told Econoff that in reaction to widespread rumors of an imminent Itsekiri attack against Ijaws (ref A), GON troops patrolled and "paraded" through the city in major shows of force that appeared to keep the peace. On September 15, a Shell security specialist in Warri told Econoff that the military is continuing such exercises day and night.

POLITICAL PATH

[2](#). (SBU) Some Ijaw leaders have recently publicly announced their support for a plan proposed by Delta State Governor James Ibori to find a "political solution" to the ongoing ethnic clashes in Warri and throughout the riverine area of the Niger Delta. Ibori has asked the State Assembly to create additional Local Government Areas (LGA) in Warri to even the ethnic balance for government representation, which currently favors the Itsekiri. Disagreement over whether (and how) to redraw the boundaries of political zones in Warri served as a catalyst for the violence in March which ultimately shut down 40 percent of Nigeria's crude oil production. This effort may prove futile, even if supported in Warri, since the federal government has floated a plan to do away with the current local government structure altogether.

[3](#). (U) But even while some Ijaw support the Governor's attempts to find a political solution to the ethnic clashes, there are news reports that unidentified Ijaw youth kidnapped six Yoruba people from Warri. Other reports surfaced on September 10 that militant Ijaw have given all Yorubas seven days to leave Warri, but the threat was publicly denied by an Ijaw activist in Lagos. The targeting of Yoruba by Ijaw, if true, appears to reflect accusations attributed to Ijaw Chief E.K. Clark that the Yoruba-based vigilante organization, Odua People's Congress (OPC), sponsored the Itsekiri in recent bloody clashes against the Ijaw.

THE MILITARY DIMENSION

[4](#). (C/NF) The GON's deployment of troops and assets appears to have reached a level that maintains order and a fragile peace in Warri for the time being. Embassy DATT has corroborated his estimate that troop strength in the Warri area is now near 4000. In his view, the Nigerian military is making a significant commitment to the joint task force mission Operation Restore Hope in the Delta swamps.

[5](#). (C) The most important indication of a more muscular military posture to come are the many reports of significant oil company assistance to the Nigerian military to purchase helicopters, boats and other equipment for use in the Delta (refs B,C). It will not arrive overnight, and will not necessarily be used well when it gets there, but the militants will see the mailed fist, and the threat of its use may be an effective deterrent. If the military uses the ramped-up presence in an offensive (refs D,E,F), it could

succeed in taking the militants down a few notches, or the engagement could prove an embarrassing disaster like the setback in March 2003.

16. (C) COMMENT. We may be entering a significant yet not altogether predictable period in the Delta. Political overtures by government officials and by leaders of the ethnic factions themselves may continue to forestall a return to major bloodshed, but results are far from certain. Furthermore, it is not clear to observers of the Nigerian military that the augmented armed forces can sustain themselves in the Delta indefinitely, even with oil company funding. If this proves to be the case, we may see a return to spotty or ineffective military operations in the mid-term, with a possible unraveling of whatever political progress may have been made in the interim. And of course, the ethnic factions themselves have rarely proved predictable, and may simply launch attacks on each other without warning. END COMMENT.
HINSON-JONES